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DECLARATION

OF THE

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COURT OF GREAT BRITAIN, *of Ireland*

RESPECTING THE LATE

George III. King

NEGOTIATION.



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1874

DECLARATION.

[PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S COMMAND.]

HIS Majesty's benevolent endeavours to restore to his People the Blessings of secure and honourable Peace, again repeated without success, have again demonstrated beyond the possibility of doubt, the determined and persevering hostility of the Government of France, in whose unprovoked aggression the War originated, and by whose boundless and destructive Ambition it is still prolonged. And while by the course of these transactions, continued proofs have been afforded to all his Majesty's faithful Subjects, of his anxious and unremitting solicitude for their welfare, they cannot, at the same time, have failed to recognize, in the uniform conduct of the Enemy, the spirit by which the Councils of France are still actuated, and the objects to which they are directed.

His Majesty could not but feel how much the means of Peace had been obstructed by the many additional difficulties which his Enemies had so repeatedly thrown in the way of every Negotiation. Nevertheless, on the very first appearance of circumstances in some degree more favourable to the interests of humanity, the same ardent desire for the ease and happiness of his Subjects, induced his Majesty to renew his overtures for terminating the calamities of War: thus availing himself of every opening which could in any manner lead to secure and honourable Peace, and consulting equally the wishes of his own heart, and the principles by which his conduct has invariably been guided.

New obstacles were immediately interposed by those who still directed the Councils of France, and who, amidst the general desire for Peace, which they could not at that time openly disclaim, still retained the power of frustrating the wishes of their own country, of counteracting his Majesty's benevolent intentions, and of obstructing that result, which was so necessary for the happiness of both nations. Difficulties of form were studiously created; modes of Negotiation were insisted upon, the most inconsistent with their own conduct in every other instance; the same spirit appeared in every step which was taken by them; and while the most unwarranted

insinuations were thrown out, and the most unfounded reproaches brought forward, the established customs and usages, which have long prevailed in Europe, were purposely departed from, even in the simplest acts which were to be done on their part for the renewal of the Negotiations. All these things his Majesty determined to disregard; not as being insensible of their purport and tendency, nor unmindful of the importance of these points, in the public intercourse of great and independent nations, but resolving to defeat the object of these artifices, and to suffer no subordinate or inferior consideration to impede, on his part, the discussion of the weighty and extensive interests on which the termination of the War must necessarily depend.

He directed his Minister to repair to France, furnished with the most ample powers, and instructed to communicate at once an explicit and detailed proposal and plan of Peace, reduced into the shape of a regular Treaty, just and moderate in its principles, embracing all the interests concerned, and extending to every subject connected with the restoration of public tranquillity. The communication of this Paper, delivered in the very first conference, was accompanied by such explanations as fully stated and detailed the utmost extent of his Majesty's views, and at the same time gave ample room for the examination of every dis-

puted point, for mutual arrangement and concession, and for reciprocal facilities arising out of the progress of fair discussion.

To this proceeding, open and liberal beyond example, the conduct of his Majesty's Enemies opposes the most striking contrast. From them no Counter-project has ever yet been obtained : no statement of the extent or nature of the conditions on which they would conclude any Peace with these Kingdoms. Their pretensions have always been brought forward either as detached or as preliminary points, distinct from the main object of Negotiation, and accompanied, in every instance, with an express reserve of farther and unexplained demands.

The points which, in pursuance of this system, the Plenipotentiaries of the Enemy proposed for separate discussion in their first conferences with his Majesty's Minister, were at once frivolous and offensive ; none of them productive of any solid advantage to France, but all calculated to raise new obstacles in the way of Peace. And to these demands was soon after added another, in its form unprecedented, in its substance extravagant, and such as could originate only in the most determined and inveterate hostility. The principle of mutual compensation, before expressly admitted by common consent, as the

just and equitable basis of Negotiation, was now disclaimed; every idea of moderation or reason, every appearance of justice, was disregarded; and a concession was required from his Majesty's Plenipotentiary, as a preliminary and indispensable condition of Negotiation, which must at once have superseded all the objects, and precluded all the means of treating. France, after incorporating with her own dominions so large a portion of her conquests, and affecting to have deprived herself, by her own internal regulations, of the power of alienating these valuable additions of territory, did not scruple to demand from his Majesty the absolute and unconditional surrender of all that the energy of his People, and the Valour of his Fleets and Armies, have conquered in the present War, either from France or from her Allies. She required that the power of Great Britain should be confined within its former limits, at the very moment when her own dominion was extended to a degree almost unparalleled in history. She insisted, that in proportion to the increase of danger, the means of resistance should be diminished; and that his Majesty should give up, without compensation, and into the hands of his Enemies, the necessary defences of his possessions, and the future safeguards of his empire. Nor was even this demand brought forward as constituting the terms of Peace, but the price of Negotiation;

as the condition on which alone his Majesty was to be allowed to learn what further unexplained demands were still reserved, and to what greater sacrifices these unprecedented concessions of honour and safety were to lead.

Whatever were the impressions which such a proceeding created, they did not induce the King abruptly to preclude the means of Negotiation. In rejecting without a moment's hesitation a demand, which could have been made for no other reason than because it was inadmissible, his Majesty, from the fixed resolution to avail himself of every chance of bringing the Negotiation to a favourable issue, directed that an opening should still be left for treating on reasonable and equal grounds, such as might become the dignity of his Crown, and the rank and station in Europe in which it has pleased the Divine Providence to place the British Nation.

This temperate and conciliatory conduct was strongly expressive of the benevolence of his Majesty's intentions; and it appeared for some time to have prepared the way for that result which has been the uniform object of all his measures. Two months elapsed after his Majesty had unequivocally and definitively refused to comply with the unreasonable and extravagant Preliminary which had been de-

manded by his Enemies. During all that time the Negotiation was continued open, the conferences were regularly held, and the demand thus explicitly rejected by one party, was never once renewed by the other. It was not only abandoned ; it was openly disclaimed ; assurances were given in direct contradiction to it. Promises were continually repeated, that his Majesty's explicit and detailed proposals should at length be answered by that which could alone evince a real disposition to negotiate with sincerity, by the delivery of a Counter-project, of a nature tending to facilitate the conclusion of Peace ; and the long delays of the French Government in executing these promises were excused and accounted for by an unequivocal declaration, that France was concerting with her Allies for those sacrifices on their part, which might afford the means of proceeding in the Negotiation. Week after week passed over in the repetition of these solemn engagements on the part of his Majesty's Enemies. His desire for Peace induced him to wait for their completion, with an anxiety proportioned to the importance of the object ; nor was it much to expect that his Minister should at length be informed what was the extent and nature of the conditions on which his Enemies were disposed to terminate the War.

It was in this stage of the business that, on

the 11th of September, the appointment of new Plenipotentiaries was announced on the part of France, under a formal promise that their arrival should facilitate and expedite the work of Peace.

To renew, in a shape still more offensive than before, the inadmissible demand so long before brought forward, and so long abandoned, was the first act of these new Messengers of Peace. And such was now the undisguised impatience of the King's Enemies to terminate all treaty, and to exclude all prospect of accommodation, that even the continuance of the King's Plenipotentiary at the appointed place of Negotiation was made by them to depend on his immediate compliance with a condition which his Court had, two months before, explicitly refused, and concerning which no farther discussion had since occurred. His reply was such as the occasion required: and he immediately received a positive and written order to depart from France.

The subsequent conduct of his Majesty's Enemies has aggravated even this proceeding, and added fresh insult to this unexampled outrage. The insurmountable obstacles which they threw in the way of Peace were accompanied with an ostentatious profession of the most pacific dispositions. In cutting off the

means of Negotiation, they still pretended to retain the strongest desire to negotiate : in ordering the King's Minister to quit their country, they professed the hope of his immediate return to it. And in renewing their former inadmissible and rejected demand, they declared their confident expectation of a speedy and favourable answer. Yet before any answer could arrive, they published a Declaration, announcing to their country the departure of the King's Minister, and attempting, as in every former instance, to ascribe to the conduct of Great Britain the disappointment of the general wish for Peace, and the renewal of all the calamities of War. The same attempt has been prolonged in subsequent Communications, equally insidious and illusory, by which they have obviously intended to furnish the colour and empty pretence of a wish for Peace, while they have still studiously and obstinately persisted in evading every step which could lead to the success of any Negotiation ; have continued to insist on the same inadmissible and extravagant Preliminary, and have uniformly withheld all explanation, either on the particulars of the Proposals of Peace, so long since delivered by his Majesty's Minister, or on any other terms on which they were themselves ready to conclude : and this in the vain hope, that it could be possible by any artifice to disguise the truth of these transactions, or that any exercise of power, however despotic,

could prevent such facts from being known, felt, and understood, even in France itself.

To France, to Europe, and to the world, it must be manifest, that the French Government (while they persist in their present sentiments) leave his Majesty without any alternative, unless he were prepared to surrender and sacrifice to the undisguised Ambition of his Enemies, the Honour of his Crown and the Safety of his Dominions. It must be manifest that, instead of shewing on their part, any inclination to meet his Majesty's pacific overtures on any moderate terms, they have never brought themselves to state any terms (however exorbitant) on which they were ready to conclude Peace. They have asked as a Preliminary (and in the form the most arrogant and offensive) Concessions, which the comparative situation of the two Countries would have rendered extravagant in any stage of Negotiation; which were directly contrary to their own repeated professions; and which nevertheless, they peremptorily required to be complied with in the very outset; reserving an unlimited power of afterwards accumulating, from time to time, fresh demands, increasing in proportion to every new Concession.

On the other hand, the Terms proposed by his Majesty have been stated in the most clear, open, and unequivocal manner. The discus-

sion of all the points to which they relate, or of any others, which the Enemy might bring forward as the Terms of Peace, has been, on his Majesty's part, repeatedly called for, as often promised by the French Plenipotentiaries, but to this day has never yet been obtained. The rupture of the Negotiation is not, therefore, to be ascribed to any pretensions (however inadmissible) urged *as the Price of Peace*; not to any ultimate difference *on Terms*, however exorbitant; but to the evident and fixed determination of the Enemy to prolong the contest, and to pursue, at all hazards, their hostile designs against the prosperity and safety of these Kingdoms.

While this determination continues to prevail, his Majesty's earnest wishes and endeavours to restore Peace to his Subjects must be fruitless. But his sentiments remain unaltered. He looks with anxious expectation to the moment when the Government of France may shew a disposition and spirit in any degree corresponding to his own. And he renews, even now, and before all Europe, the solemn Declaration, that, in spite of repeated provocations, and at the very moment when his claims have been strengthened and confirmed by that fresh success which, by the Blessing of Providence, has recently attended his arms, he is yet ready (if the calamities of War can now be closed) to conclude Peace on the same mo-

derate and equitable principles and terms which he has before proposed: the rejection of such terms must now, more than ever, demonstrate the implacable animosity, and insatiable ambition of those with whom he has to contend, and to them alone must the future consequences of the prolongation of the War be ascribed.

If such, unhappily, is the spirit by which they are still actuated, his Majesty can neither hesitate as to the principles of his own conduct, nor doubt the sentiments and determination of his People. He will not be wanting to them, and he is confident they will not be wanting to themselves. He has an anxious, but a sacred and indispensable duty to fulfil: he will discharge it with resolution, constancy, and firmness. Deeply as he must regret the continuance of a War, so destructive in its progress, and so burthensome even in its success, he knows the character of the brave People whose Interests and Honour are entrusted to him. These it is the first object of his life to maintain: and he is convinced, that neither the Resources nor the Spirit of his Kingdoms will be found inadequate to this arduous contest, or unequal to the importance and value of the objects which are at stake. He trusts that the Favour of Providence, by which they have always hitherto been supported against all their Enemies, will be still extended to

them ; and that, under this protection, his faithful Subjects, by a resolute and vigorous application of the means which they possess, will be enabled to vindicate the Independence of their Country, and to resist with just indignation the assumed superiority of an Enemy, against whom they have fought with the courage, and success, and glory of their Ancestors, and who aims at nothing less than to destroy at once whatever has contributed to the prosperity and greatness of the British Empire: all the channels of its industry, and all the sources of its power ; its security from abroad, its tranquillity at home ; and, above all, that Constitution, on which alone depends the undisturbed enjoyment of its Religion, Laws, and Liberties.

Westminster, Oct. 25, 1797.

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